

First Steps in C. S. A.

15. Workers' Associations & Employers' Federations

In our study of the capitalistic organisation of society, we tried to understand the social evils which spring from the "spirit of Capitalism". Now we shall examine one of the several methods used, especially by the working-class to remedy the evils of Capitalism. While we note that there is nothing exclusively Catholic in these associations, yet because they tend, when wisely guided, to remove social ills and bring about harmony between workers and employers they have been praised and encouraged by Pope Leo XIII and Pope Pius XI.

SECTION I—MEANING OF WORDS

Trade Union: a combination of any class of employed persons, who unite in order to maintain and progressively raise the standard of living of workers.

Employers' Federation: a body of the employers in the trade or their representatives.

Craft Union: an association of workers engaged in a single particular skilled called (e.g., electricians, weavers, etc.) in whatever industry they are employed.

Industrial Union: an association of workers engaged in a single industry or group of related industries.

SECTION II—THE GROWTH OF TRADE UNIONS

Both Trade Unions and Employers' Federations are the outcome of industrialism. In India the Trades Union Act, 1926, marks a beginning of organised Labour in the country. Unfortunately the Labour Movement in India has been, and still is, a prey to political interests; such interests caused the first rift in the movement, and split Indian Labour into two organisations: the All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) and the Indian Trade Union Federation. Still later, the unity of Indian labour was further weakened by the major political parties all sponsoring their own Labour Unions. So,

since 1949, we have in India, the Communist-dominated All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) which claims a membership of 679,143 workers; the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) with 986,983 members and the Socialist-led Hind Mazdoor Sabha with a membership of 618,802.

In the International field, the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), for many years, claimed to represent the working-class of the world. With the rise of Communism and the Communist domination of the (WFTU), the Trade Unions of the USA, of Great Britain, of Holland and some other countries broke away from the (WFTU), and now form a new Trade Union International which will represent Labour in non-Communist countries. Besides these two world labour organisations, there is the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions which built upon Christian principles of life, aims to protect Labour against both the evils of Capitalism and of State domination. Its members number several millions scattered over those European countries which are still free.

In some countries in which no Christian Trade Unions exist, there has been a growing need to train Catholic members of the ordinary Trade Unions. To meet this need, such countries have established an Association of Catholic Trade Unionists.

SEC. III—THE NATURE AND AIM OF WORKERS' ASSOCIATIONS

In *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo XIII tells us that the right to form associations is based upon the principle of the natural unity among men who share common interests, aims and needs. This is often spoken of, as the Right to Free Association. It follows, next, that so long as such associations do not engage in any activity harmful to the State or to its citizens, they are entitled to the protection of the State. Thus, the engineering personnel of a coal mine are bound to each other by closer aims and interests than to the miners of the same coal mine, but this does not mean that engineers, miners and coal mine owners should not work together for the welfare of their coal mine and of the whole coal mining industry. Hence, the *direct aim* of a Trade Union is the welfare of those within the union; and the *indirect aim* is the welfare of all those in any way connected with the industry, that is, all workers and employers of the industry, and the consumers who use the products of the industry. Unfortunately, a narrow view of Trade Unionism stresses only the welfare of union members, and thus leads to strife between unions within the same industry and between unions and industrial management.

In the same encyclical, Leo XIII warns trade union members against the danger of false leaders who would use trade unions for

the advancement of their own private gain or for political purposes. Such leaders injure the cause of Labour by, *firstly* stressing only the rights of the worker while they neglect or forget to educate the working-class to its legitimate duties and obligations. In this way, the honesty of Labour is discredited and the workingman is charged with just those anti-social vices, injustice, greed, lust for wealth which is laid at the door of Capitalism. *Secondly*, inspired by the Communist principle of "class war", false trade union leaders make the carrying out of this war a principle of unionism, thus making the whole Labour Movement a thing of violence repulsive to all honest men. *Thirdly*, by making trade union meetings a platform for political propaganda. This tends to disrupt the whole purpose of true trade unionism, because the rights and welfare of the working-class must be the concern of not only some political parties, but of the whole State. In fact, it is the duty of the State, independently of what political party controls the State, to protect the rights and further the interests of trade unions, but never to use them as mere instruments of the State.

Catholic trade unionists can do much to remedy many of these defects which spoil trade unionism in India. It is their duty and obligation, by word and example, within their own union and factory, to demonstrate the simple truth : "Rights and duties are correlative". Thus, while the worker has a right to a just living wage, he has, at the same time, a duty to give his employer an honest day's work. Again, all honest Labourmen realise the simple fact, that the welfare of the worker is bound up with the prosperity of the industry, and anything which, like class war, disrupts industrial efficiency must ultimately harm the good of the workers. Class war, moreover, for Catholics is outlawed by the Christian principles of justice and charity.

SECTION IV—EMPLOYERS' FEDERATIONS

The main objects of such associations are : the protection of the interests of the association and member firms, the securing of agreements on wages and working conditions with Labour and peaceful settlement of differences between employers and workers.

The structure of the Employers' Federation follows no fixed pattern. Sometimes such associations group together industries of the same kind, while at other times, they group different industries, or even independent organisations of various branches of the same industry. In India, Employers' Associations fall into three main groups : *Commercial Associations*, such as the various Chambers of Commerce in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. *Industrial Associations*,

which are mainly concerned with each particular type of industry, as the Bombay Millowners' Association. *Associations of Employers* which are expressly created to deal with labour problems, as the Employers' Federation of South India. These associations are often linked with local bodies through their district or regional associations which are themselves linked with national associations.

SECTIN V—INDUSTRIAL PEACE

The Holy See estimates both Trade Unions and Employers' Federations as powerful instruments for establishing industrial peace. In fact, a close collaboration between these two bodies under the general supervision of the State is best suited to meet all industrial problems. To this end, Trade Unions must shed their Communist spirit of class war, while Employers must not look with distrust upon unionism, nor foster those economic principles which concentrate wealth in the hands of the few.

Catholic Employers like Catholic Trade Unionists can further the cause of industrial peace through their respective unions. An active interest in the affairs of their associations, a faithful attendance at all meetings, an intelligent discussion on points raised at meetings, are all helpful means. Perhaps, the most effective means are separate and joint study circles of Catholic Employers and Workers ; joint meetings help a free exchange of Worker-Employer views so necessary for re-establishing the human touch which modern industry lacks and which is essential to industrial peace.

READING :—

Rerum Novarum, Paras 36-44. *Quadragesimo Anno*, Paras 29-40 ; 76-98. *Progressive Course of Catholic Social Action*, pp. 22, 23. *The Economic and Political Life of Man*, pp. 61-71 ; 111-121.

EXERCISES AND FIELD WORK :—

1. Explain clearly what Popes Leo XIII and Pius XI teach about trade unions ?
2. Should Catholics join trade unions not hostile to religion ? Give reasons.
3. Find out the number of trade unions in your district or town.
4. What is the chief cause of friction between Labour and Management in your office, factory or workshop ? How would you solve it ?
5. What is an Employers' Federation ? Explain the duty of a Catholic Employer.

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